

The Arrangement of the Judges of Hell in Japanese Buddhist Sculpture

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1. Introduction

Meikan, in Buddhist mythology, are the deities who judge the wicked when they go to hell. They originally have roots in Chinese folklore and Taoism, and probably mixed with Buddhism in the era of the Five Dynasties and the Tang dynasty⁽¹⁾. There are two Buddhist texts on these judges of hell. One is the *Enra-ō Juki Shishu Gyakushu Shoshichijō Jōdo-Kyō Sutra*, and another is *Jizō-bosatsu Hossin Innen Jūō-kyō Sutra*. The former is considered to have been written in China between the era of the Five Dynasties and the Tang Dynasty, the second manuscript was written in Japan based on the Chinese version in the Kamakura period. According to these sutra, the judges of hell were ten kings who pronounced judgement on the dead.

Visualisations of the judges of hell started around the time of Five Dynasties and the Tang dynasty in China. In Japan, the Enma-ō had already appeared in the *Nihon Ryōiki* written in 9th century, and the *Konjaku Monogatari shū* written in the late Heian period. But he was never represented visually in these texts⁽²⁾. The spread of pictorial representation of the judges of hell in Japan started in the Kamakura period.

Chinese and Japanese *meikan* are often accompanied by Jizō-bosatsu. Because the Jizō-bosatsu was responsible for relieving people's suffering when trapped in hell. As the Jizō-bosatsu often appears in the center of the group, this suggests that the Jizō-bosatsu's compassion is of greater value to people than Enma-ō's judgement.

However, in Japanese sculpture the organization is a little different. For instance, in 13th century *Meikan* sculpture had an arrangement of five, not ten deities. The Jizō-bosatsu is often in the center of the group, as in China, however, in the Hōshakuji Temple, Kyōto, the center is occupied by Enma-ō not Jizō-bosatsu.

This point has not received much attention, but it seems significant considering that worship of Enma-ō developed in the Kamakura period.

In this paper, I look at different arrangements of the judges of hell in China and Japan, and consider one particular example in which Enma-ō appears in the center.

2. Representations of *meikan* in China

The oldest known depiction of *meikan* in China can

be found in Dunhuang⁽³⁾. For example, the *Ten Kings Sutra Scrolls* and the *Jizō-bosatsu with the Ten Kings of Hell* were both created in 10th century. *The Ten Kings Sutra scrolls* combine Chinese sutra with depictions of Buddhist deities. At the beginning of the scroll, the ten judges of hell can be seen positioned around the figure of the seated Buddha. Characteristically Enra-ō wears a *benkan*, or crown signifying his superior rank in relation to the other deities. In the *Jizō-bosatsu with the Ten Kings of Hell*, Jizō-bosatsu is seated in the center of the painting, with the ten deities around him. Enma-ō in this work also wears a *benkan*, and Godō-tenrin-ō wears armor, not *dōfuku* the usual dress of judges of hell.

Other important examples can be seen in the Anyue Stone Carvings in Sichuan and Baodingshan Cave, Dazu in Chongqing. The Anyue Stone Carvings have a similar iconography to the *Jizō-bosatsu with the Ten Kings of Hell* in Dunhuang. As the Jizō-bosatsu is seated at the center with the judges around him, and Godō-tenrin-ō can be seen wearing armor. In Chongqing the Jizō-bosatsu and judges are carved as a bas-relief, above head-height, and the Jizō-bosatsu is, as usual, in the center, however, the judges of hell are arranged in a line to the left and right.

To summarise; in Chinese iconography the Jizō-bosatsu often appears in the center of representations of the judges of hell.

3. Sculptures of the Judges of Hell in Japan and the Special Case of Hōshakuji Temple

As previously mentioned, the depiction of the judges of hell in Japan began in the Heian period, and became more widespread in the Kamakura period. I would like now to look at sculptural depictions of the judges of hell in the 13th century, and consider how, in contrast with China, Hōshakuji Temple's Enma-ō appears at the center of the deities.

First, I would like to look at Tōdaiji Temple, Nara group, and Byakugōji Temple, Nara group. In both these examples the Jizō-bosatsu appears in the center. The Tōdaiji Jizō-bosatsu is bigger than the other two deities in this group, which are of similar size⁽⁴⁾. In the Byakugōji group the *seated figures of Taizan-ō and Enma-ō* are of similar size. Although there is no extant Jizō-bosatsu in the group it can be assumed that one existed and was the central figure since the main deity

would have to have been a different size, that is to say larger, than the secondary figures around it⁽⁶⁾.

The group in the Hōshakuji temple is the only extant example where a seated Enma-ō appears in the center, and all of the sculptures are intact. Enma-ō is depicted larger than the other figures, evidently so that it would promote greater adoration.

The most important issue is why Enma-ō is placed in the center of the judges of hell, while in other major works he is not. The key to understanding this problem is the prevalence of worship of Enma-ō in the 13th century. There is an interesting example in the Hasedera Temple, Nara⁽⁶⁾. According to the Kōan Sannen Hasedera Konryū Hiki⁽⁷⁾, a Doku Enma-dō hall existed in the 13th century. A head of Enma-ō still exists, and is kept at the Hasedera Temple, and it is possible that it was part of a sculpture in the original Enma-dō hall. This head is 56.6cm in height⁽⁸⁾, indicating that the entire figure of the Enma-ō would have been big enough to be the centerpiece of a group of meikan. In the Hasedera Genki⁽⁹⁾, a manuscript that records the construction of the Enma-dō Hall it is written that, “Enma-dō was built to encourage people in Buddhist practice” 「炎魔堂ヲ建テ、ハ修因感果ヲ眼前二令見」.

There is no equivalent record for the Hōshakuji Temple group. However, it is possible that background of the Hōshakuji Temple group is similar to Hasedera Temple. Enma-ō's function was not to relieve people's suffering, like Jizō-bosatsu, but rather to keep watch over, and judge people's actions. That is to say, it can be presumed that Enma-ō was placed at the center of the judges of hell as a reminder not to anger the *meikan*, and as a guardian of the teachings of Buddhism.

(1) 中野照男(Nakano Teruo), 日本の美術 第313号 閻魔・十王像(Nihon no Bijutsu No. 313 Images of Enma

and the Ten Kings), 至文堂(shibundō), 1992, p. 17.

(2) 中野玄三(Nakano Genzō), 閻魔天から閻魔王へ(From Emma-ten of Esoteric Buddhism to Emma-ō of jodo Sect – Iconographical transition of Buddhist Images), 仏教芸術150号 (Arts Buddhica Vol. 150), 1983, pp. 102–109.

(3) Nakano Teruo, op. cit., p. 32.

(4) 奥健夫(Oku Takeo), 地藏菩薩像、泰山府君像 (The seated figures of Jizō-bosatsu and Taizanhukun), 水野敬三郎編 (Mizuno Keizaburō)(ed.), 日本彫刻史基礎資料集成 鎌倉時代 造像銘記篇 第五卷 (Compilation of Fundamental Data on Japanese Sculpture: Kamakura Period Records of Images with Inscriptions, vol. 5), 中央公論美術出版(Chuō Kōron Bijutsu Shuppan), 2007, p. 89.

(5) 奥健夫, 閻魔王像、太山王像、司命・司録像(The Seated Figures of Enma-ō, Taizan-ō, Simei, Siroku.), 日本彫刻史基礎資料集成 第9巻, 2013, p. 136.

(6) 杉崎貴英 (Sugisaki Takahide), 日本中世における冥府彫像とその場をめぐる序論的覚書(上) (Nihon Chūsei Ni Okeru Meihu Chōzō To Sono Ba Wo Meguru Jyoron Teki Oboegaki Part 1), 京都造形芸術大学 紀要13号 (Genesis: Bulletin of Kyoto University of Art and Design, vol. 13), 2008, p. 246.

(7) 森末義彰 (Morisue Gishō), 研究資料 中世長谷寺再建記録 (Record of the Reconstruction of Hasedera Temple in Middle Ages), 美術研究62号(The Bijutsu Kenkyu, vol. 62), 1937, p. 76.

(8) 元興寺文化財研究所編 (Gongoji Institute for Research of Cultural Property)(ed.), 豊山長谷寺拾遺 第三輯 彫刻 (Catalogue of Treasures in Hasedera Temple Volume III Sculpture), 総本山長谷寺文化財等保存調査委員会 (Committee for the Research of Cultural Property in Hasedera Temple), 2005, p. 81.

(9) 奈良国立博物館編 (Nara National Museum)(ed.) 『西国三十三所 観音霊場の祈りと美』 (展覧会カタログ) (Worshipping Kannon: Treasures From the Thirty-three Pilgrimage Sites of Western Japan), 2008, p. 59.